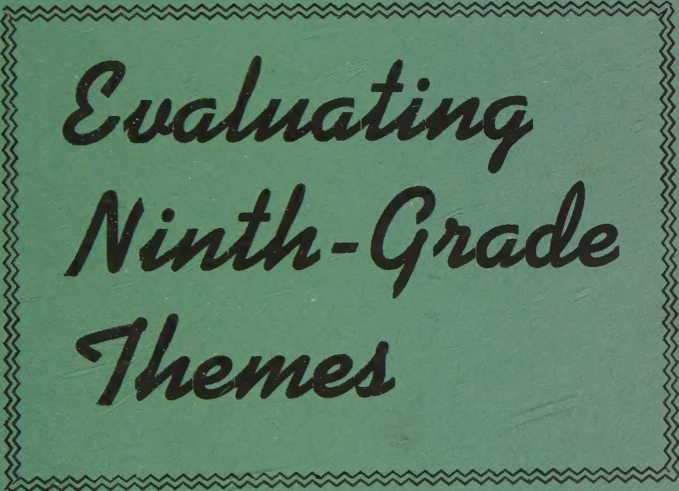


ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

Vol. 40, No. 6

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH



Evaluating Ninth-Grade Themes

MARCH 1953

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

Official Publication of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English

Vol. 40, No. 6

Urbana, Illinois

March, 1953

Published every month except June, July, August, and September. Subscription price, \$2.00 per year; single copies, 25 cents. *Entered as second-class matter October 29, 1941, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879.* Communications may be addressed to J. N. Hook, 121 Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois.

Evaluating Ninth-Grade Themes

Sponsorship and Participants

The officers of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English at their meeting in March, 1952, approved a study of current standards in evaluating compositions written by students in the ninth and twelfth grades. Later, Professor Gordon N. Ray, Head of the Department of English of the University of Illinois, agreed that the Department would serve as co-sponsor of the study. High school and college teachers from all sections of Illinois eagerly agreed to share in the work.

The committee guiding the study has consisted of Miss Betty Woller, Champaign High School, who is familiar with both ninth- and twelfth-grade classes; Professor Charles W. Roberts, Director of Freshman Rhetoric at the University of Illinois, who formerly taught in high school; and, as chairman, Professor J. N. Hook, editor of the *Bulletin*, who also has had high school experience.

Ninth-grade teachers who made the evaluations and prepared the comments printed in this issue are:

Margaret Adams, Sycamore
Joan Brosman, Lawrenceville
Mary Bynum, Olney
Florence A. Cook, Shabbona
Olive G. Dean, Bloomington
Maude E. Dorsett, Paris
Alice Grant, West Frankfort
Ruth E. Gustafson, Virginia
Mary T. Holty, Aurora
Adelina Jenkins, Decatur
Paul W. Jones, Evanston
Mother Mary Ellen, Decatur
Gertrude Pfeil, Ottawa
Fern Ranson, Lewistown
Lauretta J. Robinson, Macomb

Betty Rupp, Elgin
Lucille M. Tkach, Streator
Laura Irene Utt, Gillespie
Janet Wilson, Marion

A related study, devoted to twelfth-grade themes evaluated by other teachers, appears in the April, 1953, *Bulletin*.

Purpose of the Study

One of the responsibilities of a teacher of English is to evaluate compositions—to weigh and find what is wanting, to attach a symbol that tells the student that his work is good or poor, to write a comment that will help the student to improve his future writing in some way. If students are to become better writers, they must write, and what they write must be judged by a sympathetic and competent critic who knows what good writing is and who knows what students' capabilities are.

Here is a teacher. Here is a theme, one of many in the stack. On the paper are scratchings of black or blue, a few smudges, an erasure, a word crossed out; on this paper is the evidence of a groping attempt to convey a group of related facts, an idea or an opinion, a picture, an emotion, or a story from one mind to another. What the teacher does to that groping attempt will help to determine how successful the student will be in future communication.

Marking the paper is not easy. The misspellings, the faulty punctuation and capitalization, and the gross errors in sentence structure or usage are not difficult to spot; indeed, they may be so conspicuous that the teacher becomes engrossed in marking them and overlooks other significant matters. And on the next theme, which is free of mechanical errors, the teacher, out of sheer relief, may happily write an *A* and a *Good* even though the content and organization are poor.

What are the principles that an able teacher applies in evaluating a composition? Relatively what weight does the teacher give to content, straight thinking, organization, sentence structure, grammatical usage, diction, and mechanical matters such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling? Must the *A* paper be strong in all these respects, or may it be weak in some and exceptionally strong in others? Is the *E* paper faulty in almost everything, or is it very poor in only one or two ways? What is an "average" paper?

How much do standards rise from the ninth grade to the twelfth? What qualities may be virtually ignored in a freshman paper but stressed in a senior paper?

It was the purpose of the study to search for at least partial answers—indirect answers, perhaps—to some or all of these questions. The sponsors believe that many teachers of English will welcome and find profitable the publication of representative ninth- and twelfth-grade themes, together with evaluations and comments by experienced teachers. Young teachers may profit particularly, but older teachers may be interested in seeing whether they are in step with other teachers with experience. The sponsors believe also that students may profit from seeing the kind of analysis that is applied to their writing. Finally, and possibly most important, the sponsors believe that careful study of the evaluations may lead English teachers in the direction of a probably desirable uniformity of standards. Some evidence indicates that at present a paper marked A in one school would be marked C, D, or E in others.

Procedure

In April, 1952, the steering committee asked district leaders of the Association to assist in gathering complete sets of themes written outside of class in April or May by ninth-grade students in schools in various parts of the state. No specifications concerning length or subject matter were made. The themes were to be the results of a regular assignment, and were to be submitted exactly as written by the students, with no corrections or marks of any sort.

The committee also asked district leaders to suggest names of able ninth-grade teachers to serve as evaluators of the themes. The teachers listed above as participants were chosen from those nominated by the district leaders.

From approximately four hundred ninth-grade themes submitted, the committee chose twenty which seemed to reflect the whole range of writing ability from best to worst. Some of the themes were chosen because they were representative of specific problems in mechanics, organization, etc. that appeared frequently in the larger group.

The twenty themes, now printed in this *Bulletin*, were mimeographed and given to the nineteen evaluators at a meeting in Urbana on October 3, 1952. The mimeographed themes were arranged haphazardly, not in the poorest-to-best order in which they are printed. The original order was 13, 11, 4, 8, 2, 15, 1, 12, 9, 5, 16, 20, 6, 17, 3, 19, 18, 10, 7, 14.

Each evaluator was given a copy of the form below to be filled in for each theme:

I. A. T. E. THEME-EVALUATION PROJECT COMMENT SHEET

1. Title of theme:
2. Check list (Please check *good*, *fair*, or *poor* for every item.)

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Quality of content
Originality of treatment
Unity
Coherence
Emphasis
Paragraphing
Diction
Grammatical usage
Sentence structure
Spelling
Punctuation
3. Please write *to the student* the comments that you think would be most helpful:
4. Please write *for teachers* any additional comment that will help them in assisting students whose writing is comparable to that in this theme:
5. In one of your own classes what grade (A B C D or E) should you give this theme? Circle *one* grade. Do not add plus or minus signs.

Although nearly all teachers would write marginal comments or corrections in addition to the comment at the end, these comments were not asked for, because they could not very readily have been printed in this *Bulletin*.

When the evaluation sheets were returned, the committee compiled the results and chose the most representative, most helpful, and most penetrating comments for publication.

Ways of Using This Pamphlet

The committee believes that this issue of the *Bulletin* may be used both by teachers and by students of the ninth and possibly the tenth grades.

The committee recommends that the teacher of a ninth-grade class should read the following themes in no definite order. Before looking at the grade and comments after each theme, the teacher should read the theme, identify its strong and weak points, and decide what grade he would give it if it were written by a student in his school. Then he should compare his evaluation with that which follows the theme. Admittedly the task of grading when one does not know all the circumstances is difficult, because in one's own school the type of assignment, the instruction previously given, and various personal factors enter into determination of a grade. But the fact remains that there is a difference between good

writing and bad writing, and that a teacher is here afforded an opportunity to match his judgment with that of nineteen other evaluators, discovering whether his grades are usually higher or lower than theirs, and noticing whether he finds the same strong and weak points.

Some teachers may wish also to use the themes as a composition scale, with which their own students' writing may be compared. It is mainly because of this kind of use that the themes have been arranged from poorest to best.

The committee further recommends that sufficient copies of this issue be obtained to be used by ninth- or tenth-grade students in the classroom. The students may compare the themes and learn that there is a clearly demonstrable difference between the quality of an E theme and that of a C theme, or between a C and an A. In addition, themes that are rated "Good" in certain categories may be studied at appropriate times so that students will learn, for instance, just what good unity or good paragraphing is.

In order that as many students as possible may profit from the study, the Association is making the issue available in quantity orders at less than cost. The price for each order of ten or more copies is fifteen cents a copy.

A Note on the Grading

As the letter system (A, B, C, D, E) is apparently the most widely used in Illinois secondary schools, evaluators were asked to employ that system. In schools employing any other system, the grades may be translated thus: E represents failing work; D, poor but passing; C, average; B, somewhat better than average; A, superior.

It will be seen that in grading some of the themes the evaluators were not in close agreement. The reason is that there are individual differences among teachers just as there are among students. A particular defect in a theme may be so obnoxious to one teacher that he lowers the grade, but another teacher may be less horrified by that error and more impressed by a good characteristic; the grades given by these two teachers may be two or even three letters apart.

Taken as a group, however, the evaluators tended to agree rather well concerning each theme. Only here and there was an evaluation far out of line with the consensus. Usually there was a concentration upon one grade, or if a theme was borderline, about an equal division between two grades. No one evaluator appeared to be consistently far above or far below the median in assigning grades.

THE TWENTY THEMES

THEME 1: I AM A DROP OF WATER

Once upon a time I was in a lake and from the lake I went in a stream and then to river then one fine day the sun come out and took me up to a cloud it was very warm and all of a sudden we was very cold and we was very havery and staate to fall and then we came across a warm current of air and we start to go up and then we came across a cold current and then start to hit the ground and when we hit the ground you call rain.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Poor	Diction	Poor
Originality of treatment . . .	Poor	Grammatical usage	Poor
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Spelling	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: E (4 D, 15 E)

Comments to the Student

Did you ever listen to a speaker who used a lot of ah's as he talked? Didn't it annoy you and make you forget some important things he said? Tying all your ideas together with and does about the same thing to a reader. Give the reader a break. Make some ideas stand out as important ones while others are less important. Read your theme aloud to show up the and's and the queer spellings such as fine and sum. Make lists of the fine, dine, line families, etc.

You must have written this very rapidly, for I know that you can spell some of these words.

How did it feel to fly up to the clouds? What did you see of the earth from such an excellent vantage point? The trip to earth must have been exciting. How did it feel? I know you must have had more to say than the few words you wrote.

Let's go over this theme together. I believe you can help me find some places for periods.

What you have to write about is very interesting, but I wonder whether you could not have said it in another way. Your idea is clever. Could you break it down into smaller parts? I feel that you would like it better that way. I'll help you to reword it if you want me to. Keep on trying; you'll do better.

Comments to Teachers

This pupil surely needs individual help. Work on one or two things at a time.

This youngster is not sentence conscious, is he? He needs much encouragement and help in the fundamentals of writing.

I would suggest that you begin work on sentence sense. If he can learn to divide his thoughts into sentences, he will have accomplished much.

THEME 2: THE INNOCENT PENCIL

Once upon a time I was cut from a small peice of wood by a fine legth them I was sent to painting deparmet where lead and a nice new eracer placed on me. Mext I was painted a pretty yellow an sent to the drieving room where I dried off and was feeling very good for I was Just born into this world, when all the sudden something hit me very hard leasing a print in my side which was the stamp. From there I was put in a large box and took a long ride to the store where I was laid on the counter to be sold there I laid waiting for someone to by me. Then one day a small brown eyed boy picked me up payed the clerk off I went again the the next day come I went to school. There I got aloung very well untill something started grinding of one of my ends which was very pan full and then I was pressed agains some paper and moved in all directions the same prossess went on for a while when I begin to grow very small and my eracer wasn't there at all. When one day out of the pocket on to the floor what a bounce I took I rould then stoped seclence for a while then a large broom come "BAM! an hit me sending me rololling again when a much older hand picked me up and off I go again sailing through the air on into a waste basket. there I laid old woron out and stubby I was no good any more.

My story has been a long a sad one but I guess that is the life of the poor old Innconet pencil.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Poor
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Poor
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Poor
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: D (2 C, 8 D, 9 E)

Comments to the Student

I like your theme very much. It is bright and fresh. What a shame that because of the spelling, grammar, and sentence structure I cannot give you a higher grade.

You have a fine imagination, but, oh, those errors in running one sentence into another! You make your reader work so hard to follow you that he forgets you are being quite clever. Read your themes aloud before you hand them in.

The idea of your theme is very clever. I think the story is fine, but I would like to help you spell a little better. I'd like to go over the words you need help with whenever you can see me. We can get the story all "dressed up" in acceptable words. I know you would like it that way.

Comments to Teachers

This student deserves A for imagination and E for mechanics. Help him by encouraging his imagination and teaching sentence sense and mechanics.

Perhaps the student should use short simple sentences to develop sentence sense. Later he may be able to write more complex and compound ones. The spelling presents a big problem. Have him keep an individual list of his errors, and have someone occasionally check him on these words.

Urge this type of student to write short themes and work hard to realize complete sentences simply expressed.

THEME 3: OUR NEIGHBORS (I)

The neighbors I am going to talk about live about a quarter of a mile from our house. They are a quarrel-some family if there not quarreling among themselves there fighting about some thing else. There are five in the family four at home two boys and a girl and the father and mother.

Hardly none of the other neighbors can get along with them. They try to take care of every bodies bussiness but there own. The two boys go to school here in..... The girl which is the oldest of the children works at a city in the.....part of the state. The father works at a near by creamry the mother has poor health. The mother and father are about forty five or fifty years old.

I shall tell you of one of there expexiences. The mans father died and left an estate which they never have settled. Every settle-

ment the rest of his brothers or sisters bring up he naturally turns down. The women thought she would settle it her friend is studying to be a lawyer in Tennessee. She came up to visit this women from.....and brought her law books with her. The women from.....got ahold of the law books and looked through. She happened to run on to a section in it where it described how to settle an estate. She thought she had it all figured out but it happened that she lives in Illinois. There was only one thing wrong she had Tennessee law books. This is just one of the many happenings they go on like this all the time.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Poor
Originality of treatment . . .	Poor	Grammatical usage	Poor
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Spelling	Poor
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: D (2 C, 11 D, 6 E)

Comments to the Student

Don't you think that about ten misspelled words in one theme are too many? Correct these words and add them to your list.

You have a good surprise ending. Could you have used just that last incident for a story? Ask me to give you some model descriptions of neighbors or other people so that you can see how to keep to one main idea.

Your theme can be improved as follows: 1. Correct misspelled words; 2. note the differences in there, their, and they're and use them correctly; 3. review rules for the comma and apostrophe and use them; 4. work on sentence structure so that you do not run two sentences together.

Comments to Teachers

If there are others in the class having the same troubles with sentence structure, take time to make a special study of this problem.

I would suggest that the student first work on run-on sentences and later concentrate on spelling and usage.

An assignment has evidently been made without sufficient use of models or other preparation by the teacher.

THEME 4: OUR NEIGHBORS (II)

Our neighbors have all been rather friendly outside a few.

Our neighbor across the street has been rather friendly except for the wife who is rather grouchy.

Another neighbor was a school teacher she had a flower garden and birds came around her hard. And what made her mad was our cats chasing the birds and our dog and chickens in the flowers. She finally got married and moved away. I don't think it was because of us, because we got rid of our chickens, our cats died (all but two) and our dog got hit by a car.

The neighbors that moved into the house were not very friendly, but they did give us a dog. After they moved someone else came.

These people were the friendliest people of them all. One funny thing that happened was when she came over and asked how to cut a chicken.

The people living in the house now our friendly but they have a girl who last summer use to come over at about seven to play. Lately she has got so she takes my sisters trike home.

The neighbors on the other side of the house where there when we moved there. They have always been pretty good friends of ours. They moved to.....a few years ago and rented there house. The people that moved in where from..... They had a girl who was the meanest thing you ever saw. In spite of her meanness they were pretty friendly. They moved back to..... and the people who owned the house came back.

That is the story of the neighbors we have had.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Poor
Originality of treatment . . .	Poor	Grammatical usage	Poor
Unity	Poor	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Spelling	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: D (3 C, 12 D, 4 E)

Comments to the Student

I wonder if there might have been a quality that all your neighbors had. For example, if you could have used friendliness as a quality to be desired in neighbors and then have shown that some of your neighbors had it and others didn't, you might have had a more unified theme. Perhaps you could have developed your first

sentence into a paragraph on friendliness, referring to it again in your conclusion. However, your individual descriptions are good, and most of them mentioned friendliness.

I like your quirk of humor in the third paragraph, concerning the teacher's marriage and your lack of responsibility for it! It's good to let your personality emerge in your writing just as it does in your speaking. It might be well to concentrate on fewer persons and tell more about each; you barely mentioned the grouchy wife and the chicken cutter. Perhaps those two and the teacher would be enough material for a theme. Proofread your paper to avoid grade school errors like where for were, guve for give, there for their, and our for are.

Tell about only two or three of the most interesting neighbors. Write one paragraph on each. Make a general statement and then give some examples that show that the neighbor is the kind of person your opening sentence says he is.

Comments to Teachers

Drill on sentences; encourage whenever possible; help rambling students to concentrate on one point.

A list of the misspelled words in each theme, kept in a theme folder, is a good reminder to each student of his own personal "demons."

This student should study each sentence carefully and see that his idea is clearly expressed. Pronouns don't agree with their antecedents. Spelling errors need to be corrected. There are run-on sentences. Word choice is weak; rather, pretty, and friendly are overworked.

Teach paragraph development!

THEME 5: MY DESCRIPTION OF A CERTAIN PERSON

He is about 5'6" and weighs about 145 lbs. He is dark complected and he has brown curly hair and brown eyes. He has a scar on his forehead with glass in it from a car accident.

He is very conceited and can be very stubborn at times. One girl friend isn't enough so he flirts with them all. He has a twin brother who doesn't look any thing like him. They were both born on December 31, 1936.

He hates school so he skips when ever he feels like it. If he doesn't feel like doing home work. He doesn't do it.

He smokes about a pack every two days an He throwes the first one from every pack away for good Luck.

He is a lot of fun when he doesn't have a stubborn streak. He is polite to every one he knows. He uses his manners almost all the time He has a lot of friends and is always dressed neat.

He likes all kinds of sports. But basket ball and base ball are his favorites.

He has a very hateful temper and when he uses it Look out. The End.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Poor
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Spelling	Fair
Emphasis	Poor	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: D (4 C, 14 D, 1 E)

Comments to the Student

Your theme can be improved thus: correct misspelled words; correct grammatical errors such as borned; write complete sentences (you have one incomplete sentence); avoid running two sentences together as one; vary the first line of your paragraphs (you have started every paragraph with He); write longer paragraphs rather than just those of one sentence; review the rules for capital letters and make the necessary corrections.

You have given us a rather good picture of your friend. You will notice that you have overworked the word he. Using words such as my friend, John, this boy will relieve the monotony of always using he.

Reorganize this into a few well-organized paragraphs, possibly these: appearance, good and bad character traits, and desirable and undesirable habits and interests. Improve and vary the sentence structure.

Organize your material before you start to write—you'll save time in the long run and write a better paper. Jot down your friend's characteristics and then choose one to discuss at some length in each paragraph, or you could develop two contrasting qualities in one paragraph. Don't go to all the work of remembering to capitalize and then forget the period—this is elementary, my dear Watson! Title is rather indefinite and awkward; can you make it more picturesque?

From your description, I believe I know what kind of person he is, but if it were not for the scar, I doubt if I should know him among other people. I need to be helped to see him as you do.

Comments to Teachers

Urge this student to write paragraph essays for a while and work for organization and coherence.

Give students exercises aimed at preventing unnecessary repetition.

THEME 6: ARROW HEADS

I collect arrow heads as a hobby and I have about two hundred of them. Some of them are knife blades and I have about two spear heads and one tomahawk head. I have found most of my arrow head at a lake that I know of. I have bought about five or six arrow heads to put in my collection. The most arrow heads I have found at one time was about thirty. Most of my arrow heads are in one piece. I have all sorts, some for use in war and for hunting deer, rabbits, birds, and other small game. I have two prehistoric arrow heads which I have bought. I have a spear head that is almost perfect, a small chip is broken off of it. It is about five inches long and about three inches wide. It's about $2/8$ inches thick and it is made out of a good grade of flint. It is expertly made and the color of the flint is white. It took me two years to get all of my arrow heads.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Poor	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Poor	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: C (11 C, 8 D)

Comments to the Student

Your material is interesting, but I believe you could organize it into three or four good paragraphs if you tried. You might have one paragraph on places where you find arrowheads, another on the kinds you find, and possibly another on how the different kinds are made.

Your theme would have sounded better if you had done a little more organizing and had not repeated the same words, such as arrowheads, so much. Punctuation could have been better. Learn

to use in your writing the complex sentences we've been studying, so that you need not overuse simple and compound.

Notice your constant use of the words I have.

Comments to Teachers

If several of the class members have the same problem as this pupil, take time to work on sentence variation and ways of attaining it.

Pupils should be taught to think about definite questions to be answered in such a report and be enabled to prepare a suitable outline before writing.

Perhaps a simple outline would help this student to see the main points and subtopics. There is a lack of unity and logical arrangement.

THEME 7: THE UNFORGETTABLE MEAL

Dinner! That's a meal to look forward at many homes and other homes one would rather die than eat it. Well, as you must have guessed, the one I was supposed to have cooked was the latter one.

I started the day off by getting up at an early hour eating breakfast and then doing a few chores about the house. As I finished before I thought, I went over to the neighbors for a while to talk. Time passed quite rapidly and it was 11:30 before I left and dinner was to served at 12:30.

I was going to serve potato salad, hamburger, corn, coffee to drink and cake for dessert. Not too much but more than I could take care of. As I had started the potatoes before I left they were about done, but I decided I wanted them good and done and good and done did I have them. I then put the eggs on to boil. I put the corn on next and finally the hamburgers. After this I mixed the cake up and put the coffee on to boil.

All of a sudden I smelled something burning, I looked at the potatoes and they were burnt blacker than dirt and the smell was horrible. I then put some more water on them. Everything seemed to be going all right so I then continued on the cake. Bubbles kept appearing but I thought that didn't matter and dumped into the pan like gravel being dumped in a hole. I then smelled something, it didn't smell like the potatoes, I then thought of the eggs. I lifted up the lid and about fell over in my tracks, the eggs had run out

of water and were scorched. I threw them out and had a hard time getting that smell out of the house. I then looked at the coffee which looked like brown coloring had been poured in and instead made tea which tasted worse than vinegar. I then thought of the cake, I looked at it and it looked like a valley in the middle and it was covered with bubbles. I took it out and set it on the table. I then looked at the corn and all I could see was water and no corn. I had poured two glasses of water on it because I was taking no chances of it burning.

It was then twenty minutes after twelve and all that I had fixed was the hamburgers which didn't turn out bad at all.

Well, for dinner I served hamburgers, potato chips and cakes. I never did tell the family what happened to the rest of the food as I had dumped most of it out.

As you see, the meal I had fixed was the kind they would have rather died than ate it. Don't you think?

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: C (1 B, 14 C, 4 D)

Comments to the Student

The repetition of "it then" and "I then" becomes monotonous. You must conquer the run-on sentence. Even though actions seem close in sequence, there are rules of balance that must be observed. This is your most serious problem and should have immediate remedy.

Your ideas are good, but you've been careless with punctuation. The whole theme seems to have been written in the same big hurry in which the dinner was prepared.

Comments to Teachers

Here is another instance of a need for careful study of sentence structure.

Have the student reread her work carefully. Occasionally she omits small words.

THEME 8: NERO

No doubt you have seen the picture *Quo Vadis*, a picture which is based highly upon the life of Nero, Rome's ruler. I am going to give you my version of Nero. Nero to my belief was insane. He killed his wife and mother after he became ruler of Rome. He said that he knew that the people were calling him a tyrant but he had to kill his wife and mother to prove his power.

He then decided that he would build a new Rome, which would be the center of the universe and he would rule the world from Rome. He sent his soldiers to burn the poorer sections of Rome. While Rome burned the people tried to get away from the flames. Nero stood atop of the courtyard and fiddled. He wanted fire to be more exciting than the one at Troy. The people were rescued from the flames and they rebelled against thier ruler. Nero's wife, was in love with a soldier but the soldier with in love with a Christian girl, this made the ruler's wife angry, she advised Nero to blame the fire on the Christians. Nero gladly took the advise. The people of Rome then turned against the Christians. Nero sent his soldiers to the Christians grounds to bring the people to the dungeons to await sentence. Thousands of Christians were devoured by lions in the arena. It then came to the people's knowledge that it was Nero who really burned Rome. The people rebelled for the second time. This caused Nero to get panicky. He ran into the palace and asked his servant what to do. She told him he would be better off if he killed himself. Nero was going to stab himself but he didn't have the nerve, the servant had to push the knife in. I suppose you see why I say Nero was insane.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Poor	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Poor
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor		

Median grade: C (3 B, 11 C, 5 D)

Comments to the Student

You give more a summary of Nero in simple story action rather than prove he is insane. When you take a theme or idea to defend, you must make the whole writing support that idea—you need not retell the story. You need not even keep the material in time

sequence; rather, arrange your evidence or proof to best support your idea.

You have given an orderly account of Nero's activities, even though you may not have proved his insanity. You could inject more life into your writing by the use of varied sentence beginnings—participial phrases, infinitive phrases, prepositional phrases, and adverbial clauses—instead of always starting with the subject.

Your composition is good except for poor sentence structure. We'll discuss the run-on sentences in class, so that you and others can avoid them in your next writing.

Your sentences are short, choppy, monotonous. The use of complex sentences would make this smoother and more interesting.

Do you remember what we learned about there and their? We must also watch such tricky nouns and verbs as advice and advise.

Comments to Teachers

The sentence structure, in many places, is extremely poor. Many sentences like those in this theme may profitably be discussed in class, with the students offering suggestions for improvement.

A simple outline to build on would have been helpful: I believe Nero was insane because—1. 2. 3.

THEME 9: AVIATION

The curiosity of mankind first started the eagerness to fly. Long ago people thought about flying. They designed ships to fly but never tried them.

The Wright brothers made the first successful flying machine. They first made gliders and tried with much success. Their first flying machine was flown at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina in 1901. A great deal of credit goes to the Wright brothers for the gifts toward Aviation.

Lindberg also made history with the airplane. He was the first one to fly the Atlantic Ocean from New York to France. His plane (The Spirit of St. Louis) is now in the museum. Lindberg also receives a great deal of credit toward aviation.

Airplanes since then have been used for about everything such as war, public service, exploring, and entertainment.

Airplanes have been used mostly for War. In World War I the United States was caught off guard with no planes. They had to buy them from Britain and France. In the beginning of World War 2 the United States had faster, more dependable planes. They

were capable of doing 300 m.p.h. armed with heavy machine guns. They had two types of airplanes then: The bomber and the fighter plane. The type bomber they used at the first of the war was the B-19. The B-19 did not have enough range so the A.F. developed the B-29. Its bomb bay was plenty big enough to carry an Atom Bomb which it did. Even the B-29 was not big enough to reach far away targets. Out of that problem they developed the B-36. The B-36 is capable of carrying a 10,000 pound load 5,000 miles away and returning. But it is not big enough. They are now working on the B-47 Stratojet. It has been made but not put in mass production. The A.F. has also developed the B-52 jet bomber which can make a trip around the world without stopping to refuel. Some other fast jet fighters are the F-86 Sabre jet which is now being used in Korea. It is a proven combat fighter. Others are the XF-91, a high speed interceptor and the F-86D. It is quite different from the F-86 Sabre jet.

Airplanes have been used as a means of transportation. They are used to ship mail and other goods. C-47's are used mostly for this.

The DC-6 and the DC-4 are well known passenger planes because they are safe and easy to fly.

Aviation is still young and has a great future ahead.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: C (7 B, 10 C, 2 D)

Comments to the Student

The topic which you selected is much too big for one composition. Narrow it down to one phase of aviation, possibly a certain type of plane used in World War II. Reorganize paragraphs throughout the theme, as they are either too long or too short. Observe and correct the mechanical errors that I have marked.

You have taken a rather large topic for your theme—the Wrights, Lindbergh, or war aviation would have sufficed. You seem well informed and interested—qualities necessary for good writing. Beware of capitalizing common nouns. You have some

careless spelling and vague reference of they and which. Can you think of a more rousing or interesting title?

Try to vary your sentences. Almost all of them start with the subject.

Comments to Teachers

This student needs help in attaining sentence variety and in making his pronouns agree with their antecedents.

This theme is an example of too large a topic for a small paper. A lesson on limiting topics would be very timely.

Discuss the use of research in writing themes.

Suggest that this student make a simple outline before he writes.

THEME 10: HOW IT HAPPENS

The sun trickled lightly through cypress leaves into the crystal pool. Odyessus awoke, wiped the salt water from his eyes, and peered cautiously around the bush. There in the speckled light, stooped Nausicaa, her lithe body bending to and fro as she dipped her linens into the limpid waters. Her rosy figure was like a nude Aphrodite, chiseled in pink marble. For some minutes The Wanderer sat spellbound, his eyes riveted to the swaying body. Then he loosed his tongue for he could no longer hold his peace.

"Gad!" he hissed, "double-jointed!"

No matter how hard you try to change the story, that was how it happened. Girls and boys will always continue to court, and then go on into married life.

The urge for love comes in the springtime. Take "Harold" for instance.

A young man entered a jewelry store and handed the jeweler a ring with the stammered statement that he wished it marked with "some names."

"What names do you wish?" inquired the jeweler, in a sympathetic tone.

"From 'Harold to Irma'" the young man blushingly whispered.

The jeweler looked from the ring to the young man, and said in a fatherly manner: "Take my advice, young man, and have it engraved simply, 'From Harold.'"

But did this faze our heroes spirits? No! He thrust his chest out, squared his shoulders, and marched straight to the home of "his" Irma.

At the door he was greeted with a sore foot (the door was slammed on it) and these words:

"For the last time, I told you, no!"

Did this last remark dampen Harolds spirit? No! He interpreted it as meaning she had told him, no for the last time and was now ready to say yes!

The next time Harold came to see her, he made this remark.

"Dear Irma. Pardon me but I'm getting so forgetful. I proposed to you last night but really forgot whether you said yes or no."

"Dear Harold," she replied. "So glad you asked me. I Know I said no to someone last night but I had forgotten just who it was!"

With these words I close my story. Harold could stand the torture no longer. He ran to his home, and committed suicide by gorging himself with dried prunes. He then drank a gallon of water. You can imagine the results! And that is how it happens.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Fair	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Fair	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (5 A, 5 B, 7 C, 2 D)

Comments to the Student

Settle on one story. This is a jumble. Your material is good. Revise.

Is this original or did you combine stories you've heard? (The last two jokes I've heard before.) Be more careful with punctuation.

Your theme seems "double-jointed." The beginning, middle, and end, while not bad separately, just don't seem to fit together.

Comments to Teachers

This theme suggests Thurber to me. Is the writer purposely giving a disjointed story to be humorous, or is he just lacking the ability to think coherently?

Perhaps this student needs some guidance in the use of humor. Although this is no doubt supposed to be clever, it falls flat.

THEME 11: WHAT I LIKE ABOUT SPRING

When the Earth turns and old Sol shines just right, we have the season know as spring. The days grow longer and warmer and old Sol lends his sunny smile to make the weather completely delightful.

Old Mother Nature, who seemed to have been hibernating through the winter months, comes forth in all her glory in her new Easter suit. Her spreading green skirt, the grass, polka-dotted with beautiful spring flowers harmonizes well with her blouse of pink and white fruit blossoms.

In the meadow the ewes graze contentedly while their young lambs scamper about gleefully. There are new piggies, chickens, and even wobbly little calves. The birds, in their flashing new suits, sit in the green leafing trees and give many concerts for one and all.

Even the garden shows life as the seeds take root and tiny plants shoot above the ground.

Yes, everyone one wanders there is that delicious smell and feeling that is enthusiastically received much as a spicy kitchen is on a cool autumn day. Spring is here at last!

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Good	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (3 A, 9 B, 6 C, 1 D)

Comments to the Student

After reading your description, I can see Mother Nature in her Easter suit, I can see the meadow, and I can begin to see the garden. However, I am still in doubt as to what you like about spring.

Most words are well chosen; however, "Old Sol" and some other expressions are worn out, and "piggies" sounds babyish. Paragraph 4, which is too short, needs expansion.

Interesting experiment with comparisons. Beware of allowing comparisons to become too extravagant, however—there is a fine line between enough and too much. Your last paragraph is weak; I question the worth of bringing in the reference to autumn.

Your beginning sentence and final paragraph are not clear.

Comments to Teachers

This theme would be a good one to read aloud. Ask the pupils what they think the author meant to say in the beginning and end.

Students who write like this have acquired a large stock of trite or stereotyped words which they pull out without thinking. There should be class discussions of such words and of the value of observation. There is no evidence that this student has ever actually observed a spring day; he is merely using expressions that thousands of people have used before.

Use models to teach more effective sentence structure and paragraph development.

Careful revision, coupled with encouragement to the student, will go a long way. So that the teacher and pupil can talk over the pupil's writing, I suggest fewer themes (perhaps one a week) and an insistence on higher quality.

THEME 12: MY FAVORITE TEACHER

My sixth grade teacher was my favorite teacher. She was big-boned, husky, and tall. She wasn't pretty, but she was so nice that you didn't notice that.

She could handle children well, especially boys. She didn't let them get away with anything. She seemed to know all of their tricks. One thing I especially liked about her was that she didn't have any pets. No matter how rich, poor, smart or mischievous they were, they still meant all the same to her.

This teacher was always in a good humor. She told us jokes and read to us for a hour every morning. She could make anyone laugh.

My sixth grade teacher was always ready to protect us. For example, she wouldn't let any teacher, besides herself, give us "heck," and made girls take it easy while we played baseball.

In spite of everything she was a wonderful teacher. She drew pictures, made experiments, and illustrations.

Because of all these characteristics I liked her better than any teacher I ever had.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair
Unity	Good
Coherence	Fair
Emphasis	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair

Diction	Good
Grammatical usage	Good
Sentence structure	Fair
Spelling	Good
Punctuation	Good

Median grade: B (3 A, 9 B, 7 C)

Comments to the Student

The last part of your theme doesn't carry the same tone as the first part. Did you become hurried toward the end?

I liked the way you used adjectives. Try to make your verbs help the reader to see what you are trying to describe. Sometimes they are better than adjectives.

Each of your paragraphs has a separate idea, but they are all too short. Perhaps a little story the teacher told you might lengthen the one about her humor. An example of one time when she protected one of you would have developed that paragraph.

Many of your sentences begin with subject-verb—too many, in fact. Does your expression "In spite of everything" fit in logically?

I think that I should like your sixth grade teacher, too. This is an excellent characterization. A few more details would have helped.

Comments to Teachers

This student has possibilities and should be given every bit of encouragement possible.

A potentially good student like this can gain tremendously from work on paragraphing and on vocabulary enrichment.

THEME 13: MY HOBBY IS ALIVE

My hobby runs around, eats, and sleeps. You probably have guessed by now—I raise hamsters. If you don't know what hamsters are, I will tell you. They are little brownish gray animals with white stomachs, sharp teeth, pouches in their cheeks, and immense appetites. They eat nearly a head of lettuce a day, along with other things. Their pouches are used to store food in.

My hobby bites. They have extremely sharp teeth about a half of an inch long in the adults. If they are aroused by unusual noises or something disturbs them, they will bite.

The little creatures have babies too. They have as many as seventeen at a time. When first born, they are helpless and no bigger than a button. Their skin is transparent enough to see through. You can actually see their little insides working in them. When they are a few weeks old, they can manage for themselves.

There is only one major trouble. They die eventually. There are scrambling along on the floor one day and the next they are lying on their backs stiff as a board, dead. There is one consola-

tion in this though. If one dies, you can always get another one that is almost the same as the one that died.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Good
Paragraphing	Good		

Median grade: B (4 A, 8 B, 6 C, 1 D)

Comments to the Student

Your theme shows genuine knowledge of hamsters. At times I felt confused when you used pronouns whose antecedents were not clear. The ending of your theme is not carefully thought out. How could you improve it?

Could you make this more real by telling about one hamster's appearance and tricks and then conclude with facts you have learned about all hamsters? Ask for help in arranging ideas to keep the reader in suspense.

You need to have more sentence variety. Begin some sentences with prepositional phrases, and also use more complex sentences. There is some repetition of words and ideas—"transparent enough to see through," "are aroused by unusual noises or something disturbs them," etc. Their sharp teeth are mentioned in the first paragraph and again in the second.

Comments to Teachers

Point out the faulty reasoning in the first two sentences.

I can see this theme developed very well as a blackboard project with all the students helping in revision.

Help the pupil outline in order to plan a more effective manner of expression.

THEME 14: KING COTTON

In the early days of the republic, most farmers in America's Southern States saw little value in cotton. It was difficult to grow and harvest, and a man needed a full day to clean a single pound of it.

The age of cotton opened during Washington's second term, when the cotton gin was invented. This machine cleaned 50 to

1,000 pounds a day and put cotton among American's first important products.

Within a generation cotton was king of the South. By 1860, over half the world's supply was grown in five states from South Carolina to Louisiana. Natchez, Miss., was the capital of cotton's great empire.

When the Civil War started, it broke up the Southern economy, great plantations disappeared. Almost 4,000,000 slaves were freed . . . but for most of them cotton was the habit of life, and they remained to rebuild the land.

During the first half of the 19th century the Mississippi River was a king's highway. All along its banks planters had private landing places . . . tiny ports . . . were bright fires signaled passing steamboats that cotton was waiting for shipment to Natchez and New Orleans and the Great capitals of the world Beyond. These were Golden times. They have went deep into the history of America.

Today on plantations in the South and West, cotton has entered a new time. Science has made this simple plant, one of the most usefull ever grown—yielding everything from clothing to drugs and plastics.

And today, too, small cotton farmers are facing the challenge of machinery. On vast plantations mechanical pickers and planters are proclaiming the dawn of a new and brighter empire for king cotton.

The traditional South of one-mule cotton farms may soon pass into history with plantation houses and slavery. In Texas, machinery is already proving many times more effient than hand labor.

Yet this spring men and women throughout the South will return to the cotton fields as they for more than 150 years. Once again they will produce almost one-half off the worlds cotton.

Fading now are the traditional symbols of cotton's empire. Replacing them are new efficiency, new methods, new vigor to supply the demands of a nation where abundance is forever a way of life.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (3 A, 11 B, 4 C, 1 D)

Comments to the Student

I believe you would combine some of your paragraphs if you would spend more time on organization. I like the way you have varied your sentences by beginning some of them with phrases.

You have given us interesting facts about cotton, but it seems to me that you have failed to give a topic sentence which tells us what you are going to prove.

Take care in using capital letters—there must be a reason for each one. Don't confuse were and where.

Be sure to indicate the sources of information that you use when you write a theme based on research.

How did that have went slip in there? It really ruins a fine paragraph. You have good potential but lose effectiveness because of some gross mechanical errors that you are intelligent enough to avoid.

Comments to Teachers

Here is another student who would profit from instruction in reducing the size of a topic.

The student should be taught that taking scattered ideas from a book is not writing a theme. He needs to be taught how to develop paragraphs.

This theme deserves being read to the class. Here's a chance to discuss personification.

THEME 15: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

We should look beyond the surface of things, then we would truly see. Let us look with the eye of the mind. We always see material things like leaves, grass, flowers and trees but we should look closer. All of us certainly remember the frost of autumn and the falling snow. Now we are having the great transformation. The warmth of spring, the melting earth, the tiny green leaf, the continual change that is Life. A quick glance is not seeing with the eye of the mind, for impatience is the enemy of thought. How often do we see a loaf of bread, but how much do we actually see? Do we see the tiny seed flung into brown earth? Do we see the gentle rains that refresh the sprouting grain? Do we see the summer winds that bend the golden heads of grain in waves across the field? Do we see the bending backs of the harvesters? Or great mills separating chaff from grain, distributing white mountains of flour to all parts of the world? Do we see ships and men and far-off ports? Do we see mothers backing sweet-scented loaves on

Saturday morning, making apple turnovers from the dough that is left over? And hungry boys and girls filing into the kitchen to benefit from the fruits of men and nature? We should look at things slowly. Let us look with the eye of the mind. For through the eye of the mind all things are beautiful.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Good
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (4 A, 9 B, 6 C)

Comments to the Student

The content of your theme shows rather mature thinking. The questions you use are thought provoking and very effective. It seems to me that the transition from "the continual change that is Life" to the next thought is too abrupt.

You become quite eloquent in the last half of the theme, but to me the first half seemed more halting and at times incoherent. This is not surprising, since philosophical writing can often best be clarified by specific examples, such as you use in the last part. I would use a dash to connect "transformation" to the series of appositives following. In a way you are compressing too much into a small space in the first part and not using enough transitions. Good parallel structure.

A good composition is divided into paragraphs. Your ideas seem to require two: one on the great transformation and the other on seeing too quickly. Most of your sentences are strong. Your use of verbs and adjectives helped me to understand your fine thoughts about material things.

I like your theme but am not sure that the title is the most appropriate one. It doesn't bring out the idea of looking beyond the surface of things.

What a beautiful thought! Remember what we said about paragraphs and about sentence fragments?

Comments to Teachers

This student is groping for something and should not be discouraged. His potential is unusually high. If possible, the teacher

should have an individual conference with the student and help him organize his vivid ideas.

This student's incomplete sentences and his run-on sentence may be intentional, but it would be wise to talk with him about them to make sure that they are.

THEME 16: MY EMOTIONS ON LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

As I stood on Lookout Mountain near Denver Colorado where Buffalo Bill is buried, I felt a mixture of emotions. My first feeling was one of power when I looked at Denver through a telescope. Then when I noticed the ant-like cars moving on the streets I was fascinated. My next feeling was that of awe as I swung the telescope around and looked at the beautiful scenery in the mountains up which we had driven. Another strong feeling came when I looked at Buffalo Bill's grave and at all his pictures in the museum because I thought of all the things Bill Cody did: scouting, shooting buffalo for the army, riding cavayard for wagon trains, and riding pony express. At the same time I felt an appreciation of historians who have given a record of Cody's life which I read before I went West. My last emotion was one of delight at finding among the souvenirs a copper Buffalo Bill key chain to add to my collection. As I left I was glad that I and my family could be among the thousands of people who go every year to the simple grave of this great scout.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Fair	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Good	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (4 A, 10 B, 5 C)

Comments to the Student

A couple of misspellings and some mistakes in punctuation kept your theme from receiving an A. Be more careful of form.

You express yourself very well. You have an easy, fluent style that makes the reading of your theme very pleasant. The transition from one feeling to the next is well done; however, you could have added more details to give us time to digest and appreciate your feelings.

Would more than one paragraph be better? "I and my family"—we place ourselves last.

Good device to go from the distant to the near; this gives your theme good organization. Effective transitions give your theme a fluid quality. These transitions almost justify your single paragraph, but you might have made a break when you leave the telescope and see the close things.

This excellent plan could have been developed into a longer theme, with a paragraph for each of the emotions. Why did you have a feeling of power? Why were you fascinated by the ant-like cars?

Excellent. There are two sentences that could be strengthened by better placing of subordinate clauses. Can you find them?

Comments to Teachers

A pupil who writes like this can be challenged to reach higher levels of creative expression.

Help this student to expand and develop his thoughts.

THEME 17: TO SEE AND NOT TO SEE

Hello! It's nice to see you again. Again? Why, sure I've seen you before. Maybe you haven't seen me, but I've been right there beside you all the time. Yes, you guessed it. I'm the little man who wasn't there.

And boy! The adventures I've had and the sights I've seen. I bet I'm the only one who's been in a one person phone booth while someone else was making a call.

Once I found myself in a girl's dormitory. Huh? Of course it was by mistake.

Don't be envious, boy, but I once sat on Betty Grable's lap without her knowing it. When the cameras swung around to shoot us I skipped out because I was afraid I wouldn't photograph well.

Of course, there are disadvantages to being invisible.

When anything turns up missing I get blamed, even though I was a hundred miles away, or more.

Once I was trapped on a crowded subway. Because the people couldn't see me, I came out flatter than gravy under a steam roller.

I'll never forget the time I was caught between a fleeing bank robber and a police squad, shooting it out. I am now the only perforated air space in the world.

Gosh! *Tempus fugit*. I've got to be going.

Come see me sometime. That is, if you can find me.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Good	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Good
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (7 A, 8 B, 4 C)

Comments to the Student

You have some clever ideas, but this seems jittery.

Your title and writing hold the reader's interest. I like your informal, familiar style and humor.

I enjoyed reading your theme. It was original, and your sentences are well written. I believe you might improve it by writing in paragraphs instead of in so many separate sentences. A little planning would make this into a really first-class theme. For example, the situation in the subway could be described more in detail, not just mentioned.

Delightful trivia. Clever, specific examples. Be sure you develop your talents for the serious stuff, too.

Comments to Teachers

The class would enjoy this theme particularly.

Direct this student's talent gradually away from imitation of radio or television programs, and utilize his ability in school projects. Be sure that he has opportunity to do some straightforward, serious writing.

THEME 18: SPRING IN THE APPLE ORCHARD

After the spring rain has come I make a short visit to the apple orchard, for here where it is quietest, I always find rest and contentment as only mother nature can provide.

As I walk down the broken path, I can see the new blossoms, wavering in the highly scented breeze. Now and then a blossom will break and come fluttering like a flake of snow, to the ground which is now being carpeted with a new growth of grass. As I open the creaky old gate, a hinge snaps and sends a hen, with her chicks, running for a nest.

Say, over there stands the new foal, playfully kicking up his heels and then racing back to its mother. But she doesn't pay any attention to him, she's busy cropping the new grass, saying that it's always freshest in the spring just after a rain.

I walk along, nearer to the trees, seeing the remains of last years apples. They lie, rotted on the wet grass some partially covered by the new blossoms, and I keep saying that this year we'll get 'em all canned. It's a shame to waste 'em when we all like apples as much as we do.

"I wonder if the lady wouldn't like a spray of these blossoms," I say to myself, so I set to work and pick a big bouquet, thinking that it is just right for that vase on the kitchen table.

Wh, there's a bluebird up there in that old house I built a long time ago. I put that wire around it so the cat couldn't kill all our birds.

The lady, she likes birds a lot, and often I find her just sitting out here, like me, watching 'em feeding worms to their youngens.

"Shucks," wonder what scared it?" There it goes over to another tree, making a blueish blure against the billowy whiteness of the blossoms.

As I walk along, I spy a blue object on the ground, pick it up and find that it is a broken bird's egg. Now maybe we'll have some baby bird's this year. We never had many last year. In fact, I only found ones nest and those were pigeon eggs.

I walk over to an old stump, and involuntarily set myself down, fingering the egg and wondering how many more there was. Oh well, I'll leve 'em be, cause some people say birds won't come back to their nest if you touch the eggs. Can't say as I rightly believe it, but I reckon I'd better leave 'em alone, just to be on the safe side.

Now I come to my favorite spot in the orchard, the bee hives. I like to watch 'em in late summer a hustling to get the honey all made before the flowers die and winter sets in. There isn't many out today, just one a flying here and there, but you should see 'em in summer, there so thick that you couldn't begin to count 'em.

Why, I almost forgot what the lady sent me out for. So I go into the chicken house sending the hens a fluttering and a squawking, and fill the basket with eggs.

Now there she is a calling for supper aready. Didn't know I'd taken half this time.

So I take my last look at the blossoms, now somewhat darkened by the shadows of evening, and still wavering in the breeze, shoo another hen out of my path, give the foal a friendly pat on the flank, and close the creaking gate behind me.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Fair
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Good	Spelling	Fair
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair		

Median grade: B (8 A, 6 B, 5 C)

Comments to the Student

A well-written theme. However, you can improve it by correcting misspelled words. Also capitalize Mother Nature (remember personifications?) and note the difference between there and they're.

There is a human interest element in your story that is appealing. I presume that you are imitating the informal language of someone else and that this isn't your idea of good English.

Interesting. You seem uncertain about the type of person you want to portray—at first you are quite exact and poetic and later you develop a homespun flavor along with grammatical irregularities. Decide which one you want and stick to it—each has its value. Good aside comments and conversational bits—somewhat like Robert Frost's technique.

In spots you show a very nice feeling for the things you are describing, e.g., the bluebird against the white blossoms and "fingering the egg." I believe you could write some excellent nature poetry. You seem very observant.

Comments to Teachers

Point out the advantages of improving the mechanics of writing to match the writer's skill in describing.

It is difficult and perhaps unwise to mark the grammatical usage of a student who uses dialect so effectively. Be sure, though, that he has opportunity to write other things where dialect would be inappropriate.

This student is probably the best writer—at least potentially—among the twenty. He writes easily and seems to enjoy the process.

THEME 19: HALL STEPPERS

Hall steppers! That really sums up the whole of my story of the school I attend. In the main part of the building we have three floors; the halls are built on a square and in the middle of this square the auditorium rises from first floor making the halls narrow. Every morning from seven o'clock to eight-twenty, the students, boys and girls alike walk around, again, again, and again. One complete revolution and a student has walked one-fourth of a mile.

One teacher relates the story of having watched a couple of boys walk around the halls, fifteen times before the bell rang for home-room period. Upon inquiry, he found they were expelled from two classes for sawing the log too loudly. I guess walking seven and one-fourth miles tires a person.

Walking the halls and taking notice of what's going on, you see tall, short, fat, thin, cute, not so cute, and just plain goofy looking boys and girls. Some of them walk terribly fast while others saunter along at a snail's pace. This heterogeneous maze of teenage humanity consists of the most intelligent, the not so intelligent, the principal's daughter, the politician's son, the two girls of the coal miner and both son and daughter of the poor underpaid school teacher, etc.

The average observer usually takes note of the countenance and appearance of these hall-steppers, some got up at five, maybe to deliver papers, fire furnaces or feed the livestock before exerting themselves till they feel like dropping. Others got out of bed at the very last possible moment, threw on their clothes and in great haste hurried so they could walk the halls in order to see their boy or girl friends. There are others that are so amorously in love they are quite oblivious to the fact that those two-legged humans walking by have just as much if not more personality and good looks as they think one another have.

Once in a while a loud heinous and fiendish snicker is heard produced by a group of boys making jokes that only they can laugh at, while some of the more gentlemanly boys (?) grow a beet red color from neck up. The girls smile and walk on, each trying desperately their version of the debutantes slouch.

These are the future parents, doctors, bricklayers, lawyers, coal-minders, secretaries, and maybe even presidents of the United States of America.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Fair
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Fair
Paragraphing	Good		

Median grade: B (9 A, 6 B, 3 C, 1 D)

Comments to the Student

You make us see quite clearly the boys and girls who walk in the halls. Notice that you have one run-on sentence.

Make this more coherent by using transitional words or phrases.

Your descriptions are effective. Good use of adjectives and adverbs has helped me to see your halls as you see them. However, I am not entirely sure what one effect you tried to create in the whole theme.

Clever! Good variety in sentence structure.

Avoid two words so repeated that they mean the same thing—amorous and love, haste and hurry.

Your idea is very clever, and your theme very interesting. Take time to proofread so that you can catch your own mistakes.

You have a good idea for a kaleidoscopic theme. But you must let us see each person objectively and make our own conclusions regarding his personality. You put yourself in this too much as a critic.

Comments to Teachers

If the author is willing to have his theme discussed, it might help the whole class to work out just what ideas he was trying to convey in several of his sentences.

Help the student to avoid calling attention to others' foibles so that he can feel superior.

THEME 20: THE RAINSTORM

Our first spring rainstorm came gradually, as if hanging back. Little gray-blue cloudlets scudded across the darkening sky to join and become big purplish-black thunderheads. The air became heavy as if a huge, invisible hand was pressing down. The wind began to rise and stir the trees. The poplars went into a frenzy of rustling.

Suddenly, as if the bottom of the sky was torn open, the rain washed down. The air was electric with lightening, and our ears rang with the continuous roars of the thunder. Just as the rain began to die away, a new streak of lightening tore open the sky and a whole lake of water descended upon us.

Then the torrent gradually ceased. The kettle drums of the thunder dimmed. The purple curtains of the sky drifted back to reveal to all, a new, clean world, fresh from its first scrubbing of the year.

Evaluation

Quality of content	Good	Diction	Good
Originality of treatment . . .	Good	Grammatical usage	Good
Unity	Good	Sentence structure	Good
Coherence	Good	Spelling	Good
Emphasis	Good	Punctuation	Good
Paragraphing	Good		

Median grade: A (17 A, 2 B)

Comments to the Student

The imagery in your theme is excellent. Topic sentences are good. Transition words make it easy for us to follow the phases of the rainstorm. The last sentence is particularly effective.

This is an excellent theme. I like your choice of words and your organization. What a shame to mar such good writing with a misspelled word, a mistake in usage, and one in punctuation.

Nicely done! You have effectively stimulated our senses without markedly overdoing it. Check one use of subjunctive with as if.

Original and colorful. Well-chosen words and contrasts. How about a "little cloudlet"?

Comments to Teachers

To me this is the best theme in the entire group. The diction is excellent.

This theme should be shared with the class. Emphasize the fact that a short theme can be a good one.

Be sure the student can do objective, expository writing as well. (Too many students are required to write only the one type that they do best.)

